

Character Class

Psion -- Cerebral Prodigy

By Skip Williams



Anyone wishing to explore psionic powers to their fullest extent possible should consider a psion. The psion is the psychic equivalent of the wizard. The class boasts a tremendous range of mental powers, placing psions among the most potent and versatile characters in the game.

Assets

When you choose a psion, you have access to many formidable psionic powers, but the class also has a few hidden resources. Here's a brief list of things you'll have going for you when you choose a psion.



- **High Skill Points:** Psions receive a mere two skill points per level, but don't let that fool you. Psions have high Intelligence scores (because Intelligence governs their psychic abilities), and a high Intelligence score boosts the number of skill points they have available.
- **Good Will Saves:** A psion uses the best progression for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This helps the psion resist most effects that attack or fool her mind or assault her spirit, such as charms, compulsions, illusions, fear, and even *inflict wounds* spells.
- **Good Power Selection:** The psion power list is unmatched for flexibility and sheer size. With the right power, you can damage or slay foes, whisk yourself (and your friends) to safety, discern hidden truths, throw up impassable barriers, create useful things out of thin air, or work profound transformations on yourself or the creatures and objects around you.
- **Discipline:** A psion must choose a particular area of psychic study. The psion class includes six disciplines -- clairsentience (information gathering powers), metacreativity (powers that shape items or creatures from ectoplasm), psychokinesis (powers that transform matter and energy), psychometabolism (powers that alter creatures' mental or biological states), psychoportation (powers that move items or creatures in space or time), and telepathy (powers that allow mental contact between creatures or provide

mental control over others).

Choosing a discipline gives the psion access to a short list of exclusive powers (and a few class skills other psions don't have). The psion cannot choose powers from other discipline's lists, but this still leaves a broad array of powers available.

A discipline also can serve as an underlying theme for the character's approach to life, adventuring, and psionic study.

- **Bonus Feats:** A psion gains bonus feats at 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th level. These feats must be psionic feats, metapsionic feats, or psionic item creation feats. A psion's selection of bonus feats can greatly expend her power.

Weaknesses

Psions pay a heavy price for their extensive psionic powers. Here are a few you'll want consider when thinking about a psion character.

- **Low Hit Points:** The psion gains only 4-sided hit dice which inevitably leads to a low hit point total.
- **Poor Armor Class:** The psion has no proficiency with any kind of armor or shield. As a consequence, the character has a low Armor Class. The combination of low hit points and low Armor Class leaves most psions vulnerable in physical combat, especially melee. Many psionic powers, especially those from the psychometabolism discipline, can improve a psion's defenses. Employing such powers, however, expends time and psionic potential that the psion could use for other things.
- **Poor Weapon Selection:** The psion has proficiency with the club, dagger, heavy crossbow, light crossbow, quarterstaff, and shortspear -- not a world-beating collection of weaponry.
- **Poor Attack Bonus:** A psion's base attack bonus is +1 per two psion levels, which is as bad as any in the game. Psions can dish out lots of damage with their spells, but they don't do well with weapons.
- **Poor Reflex and Fortitude Saves:** Psions have the worst progression for Reflex and Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Psions aren't good at avoiding attacks on their bodies.

Playing a Classy Psion

People who play great psions usually keep the following in mind.

Think for the Long Term

Among the most critical decisions you'll make as a psion is choosing your personal repertoire of psionic powers. Once you choose a power, you cannot unlearn it and choose a new one, so choose powers that you think you'll want to keep using throughout your career (the *psychic reformation* power allows you to change known powers if you give up some experience points). Choose powers that will help you deal with as many different situations as possible. It's hard to go wrong with powers that deal damage, but choose powers that deal different kinds of damage or that use different kinds of energy. Don't forget the power list for your discipline -- these lists are short, but they contain powers that other characters usually can't learn. If you choose the Expanded Knowledge feat, you can learn just about any power you like, subject to the limits noted in the feat description.

No matter what your discipline is, it pays to include in your personal repertoire a few powers for travel, defense, and miscellaneous tasks. Always consider powers that you can use in several different ways. The *far hand* power, for example, is good for performing all sorts of tasks at a distance.

Powers aren't the only tool you have at your disposal. A few weapons, alchemical items, and other equipment can greatly expand your options.

Remember that you are one of your party's most vulnerable members. Make sure you have a proper place in the marching order -- preferably in the middle with at least one ally between you and your foes.

Manifest Early, Manifest Often

Your chief asset is your ability to manifest any power you know, provided you have the power points to do so. Unspent power points at the end of the day represent wasted potential. Of course, you should not waste your power points on frivolous or ineffective power manifestations, and it pays to keep a reserve of points available just in case you get in a bind where only a certain power will do (or if you have an encounter after you and your group have retired for the night). As a rule of thumb, keep enough power points on hand to manifest your highest level power once or twice. If you know or strongly suspect trouble ahead, keep more power in reserve. Otherwise, put your powers into play as often as you can.

Remember Your Friends

The sheer power you command as a psion can make you cocky. Don't forget that physical attacks can defeat you pretty quickly. You need the rest of your party for protection.

In addition, you must be careful not to become your party's worst enemy.

The Party's Front Line: The rogue, ranger, bard, or monk in your group often serve as a scout for the rest of the party and often will locate your foes for you. These characters, along with the party's more heavily armored types (particularly fighters and paladins) form a fighting line that keeps enemies away from you. Be ready to support those characters with your powers in case they get into trouble. When manifesting your powers, be careful to aim them so your friends aren't caught in their destructive effects. Nothing wears out your welcome faster than poorly aimed powers that hurt friend as well as -- or more than -- foes.

Spellcasters and Other Manifesters: You probably aren't the only character in your party who wields psychic powers or spells, so don't act as though you are. Arcane spellcasters can produce many effects that are similar to what you can produce.

Divine spellcasters have potent spells, too. Other psionic classes, such as psychic warriors, have power lists that are slightly more limited but probably more focused than yours.

Learn what spells and psionic powers are available in your group, and be ready to fill in the gaps in each character's capabilities. When your capabilities overlap another character's, try to divide tasks between you in some equitable manner. For example, if you are a kineticist (psychokinesis discipline) with a roster of attack powers good for blasting foes, ask the spellcasters and other manifesters in your group to handle tasks such as transportation, information gathering, and defense. Blasting foes can be fun, however, so don't hog all the action. You might divide up the battlefield into sections that different characters can cover, or develop a sequence of attacks that can really hurt a foe. For example, perhaps you might use *energy push* to knock a foe back and an allied wizard or sorcerer can hit the same foe with a *magic missile* spell.

Some Key Equipment

Your powers are more important to you than your gear, but a few pieces of the right gear can make your career longer and happier:

- **Melee Weapon:** You're not much good in combat, but you never know when you'll need to resort to hand-to-hand combat. The club, quarterstaff, and the shortspear have the best damage potential of the few melee weapons available to you. Among the three, the shortspear is arguably the most flexible, because you can throw it a fair distance if you need to, ready it against a charge, or use it as a probe.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A light crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack power against some opponents. Use it when necessary to conserve your power points, such as when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit power use. A heavy crossbow deals more damage with a single hit but has a slower rate of fire than a light crossbow. In many cases, you will find using a power to be more useful than taking multiple shots.
- **Backup Powers:** You never know when you'll run out of power points, and you never know when you'll need a particular power and need it very badly. It's hard to beat a cognizance crystal for keeping a few power points in reserve.

A dorje is useful for manifesting powers that you use often, such as energy ray, body adjustment, or detect hostile intent. Best of all, you can use a dorje to manifest any power on the psion class list or your discipline's list, even if you don't know the power.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of **Dragon Magazine** for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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